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ABSTRACT

Highlights of a Basic Skills Learning Centers (BSLC) Project are presented at the end of two full years of the three-year program, which was designed to provide nonurban elementary schools in 20 western states with resources to help teach basic reading and mathematics skills. A description of the participating schools (489 schools in 145 districts) reports school size, family income, and ethnic and language diversity of pupils. Graphs and narrative text summarize the achievement of the 95,000 students who participated in over 4,000 BSLC programs during 1977-78. Two measures of progress--the BSLC Pupil Attainment Tests and the amount of BSLC instruction completed--show a substantial proportion of students halting or reversing their slide into remedial status. A section on information sharing describes support materials and data collection forms for participating schools, a project newsletter, and a film designed to give school and community groups an impression of BSLC in action in the school. Use of BSLC materials beyond general remedial purposes is discussed, including their use with handicapped children and older students still needing basic skills remediation. (JH)

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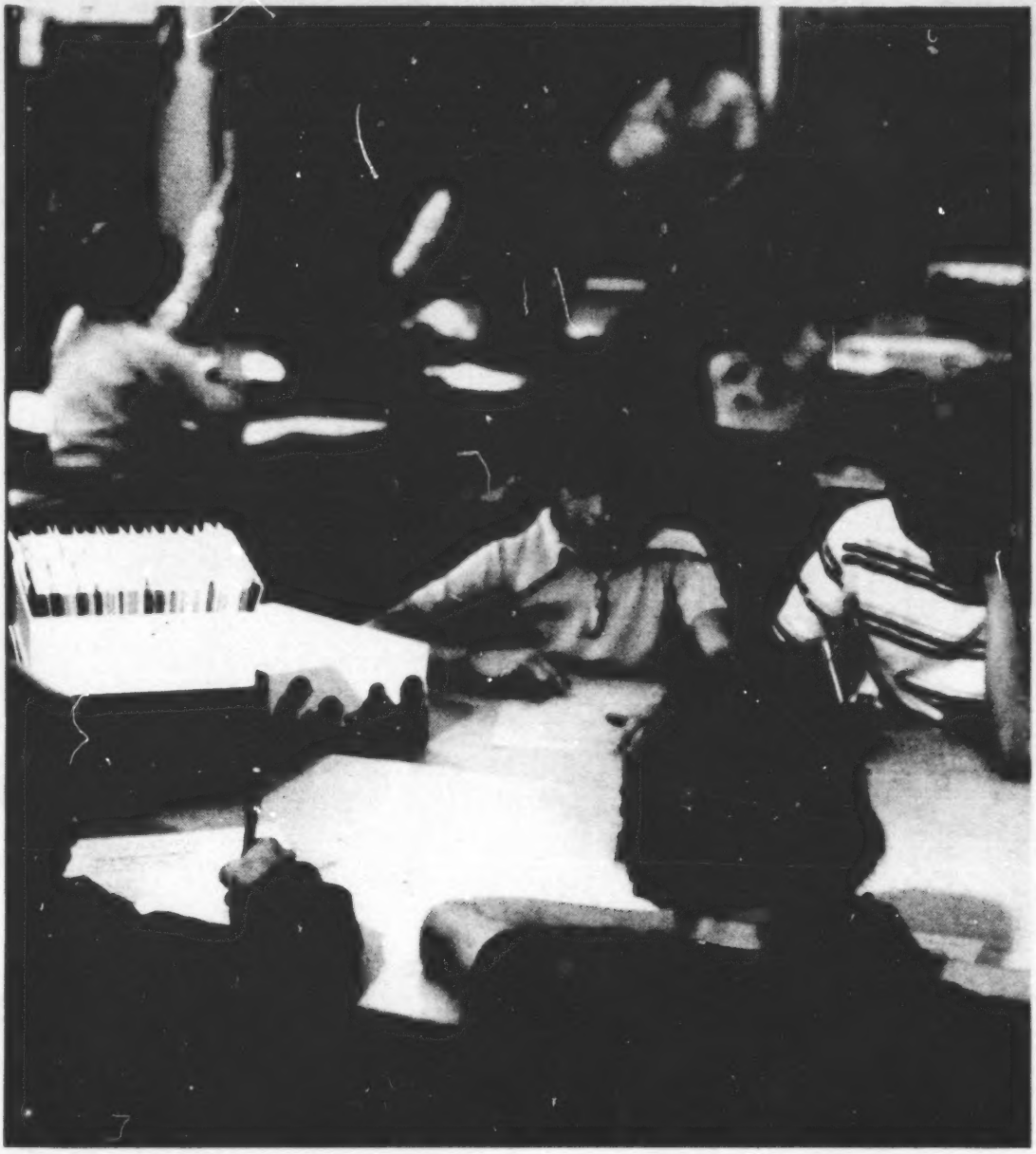
THE BSLC PROJECT
ANNUAL REPORT 1978



. . . funded by the Community Services Administration

The Community Services Administration, a federal agency formerly the Office of Economic Opportunity, sponsors programs and services of various kinds to help local communities. Recognizing the problems and needs of today's education, CSA responded to local community initiatives by providing funding for the Basic Skills Learning Centers Project.

. . . developed by SWRL Educational Research and Development

SWRL is a public, nonprofit organization dedicated to educational research and development. For the past 12 years SWRL has transformed educational research findings into resources and services for the nation's schools. Funding support from the National Institute of Education, CSA and other agencies combined with cooperative working relationships with nearly 1,000 school districts across the nation have helped SWRL make research-based educational tools available to assist the instruction of millions of children. Research, development, and service activities at SWRL involve a broad-based, multidisciplinary staff drawn from national academic talent, well grounded in all areas of professional education. Based on this experience, SWRL has developed all instructional and administrative materials for installing and maintaining the Basic Skills Learning Centers Project.

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The BSLC Project In Its Second Year

The Basic Skills Learning Centers (BSLC) Project began September, 1976, when SWRL was selected by the Community Services Administration to provide nonurban elementary schools in 20 western states with resources to help teach the basic skills. Beginning with a major planning emphasis during the first year, the project in its second year has focused on instruction, pupil achievement and project success. Now at the end of two full years, the highlights of the project are described in this second annual report.

Project Resources

The BSLC Project helps children who need extra help in acquiring basic reading and math skills. The project provides classroom resources and technical support for helping teachers identify these pupils and give them the extra help they need. The instructional resources include 12 Learning Center kits, six devoted to reading and six to mathematics, which can be arrayed in a variety of combinations to equip customized Learning Centers. Designed primarily for use in grades 1-6, the kits are accompanied by planning, placement, and testing materials so that Learning Centers can be planned and established to meet school and district needs. All resources are made available to schools without cost, developed by SWRL and financed by the CSA.

Project Participants

The BSLC Project involves more than 145 school districts throughout the western U.S. There are 489 schools with a combined enrollment of 157,000 that have more than 4,000 Learning Centers serving the participants. Participating school districts are located in counties selected by the CSA. School districts were responsible for selecting the schools for project participation. School, district, community, CSA, and SWRL efforts can all be credited for making these first two years a success.

Word About BSLC Has Spread

SWRL has received requests to join the project from several additional districts including large districts located in urban areas. At this stage in the project, we are not able to include new participants, but hope that it will be possible to serve others through similar new projects. Many persons are also learning about BSLC through visits to the SWRL facility in Los Alamitos, California. We have prepared several displays that describe the project showing the locations of participating districts and highlighting its progress. We encourage visits to the Laboratory and are happy to provide information and a tour of the facility.

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A Glimpse of School Backgrounds

The BSLC Project is an answer to a very real and important educational need. Most Learning Centers are located in rural school districts where schools often do not have the resources available in large urban areas. Children participating in the Learning Centers represent families with low incomes and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The BSLC Project was created to provide the kind of basic skills instruction that would best meet specific remedial needs in basic reading and mathematics. Demographic data collected during the 1977-78 school year verify the careful planning that went into the selection by districts of schools and children who most needed the supplemental basic skills instruction. The schools served by the Centers have reported a past experience of low score results on standardized tests in reading and mathematics.

The estimated median family income across the BSLC Project schools at less than $10,000 is well below national and regional figures. In fact, 81% of the schools are eligible for ESEA Title I funds—federal funds that are intended to aid areas of high concentrations of pupils from low-income families. The BSLC Project has provided program materials and support services without cost to participating districts with the stipulation that each district provide within its present staff the time and effort to plan and operate the Learning Centers.

Another factor in the original selection and invitation of schools to participate in the BSLC Project was ethnic and language diversity. The percentages of Spanish-surnamed, Oriental, American Indian, and Black pupils in the Learning Centers across the BSLC Project are greater than overall school and regional percentages of pupils in these groups.

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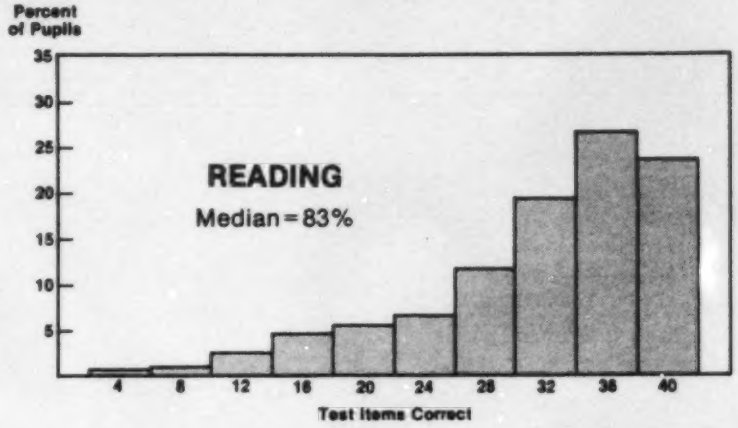

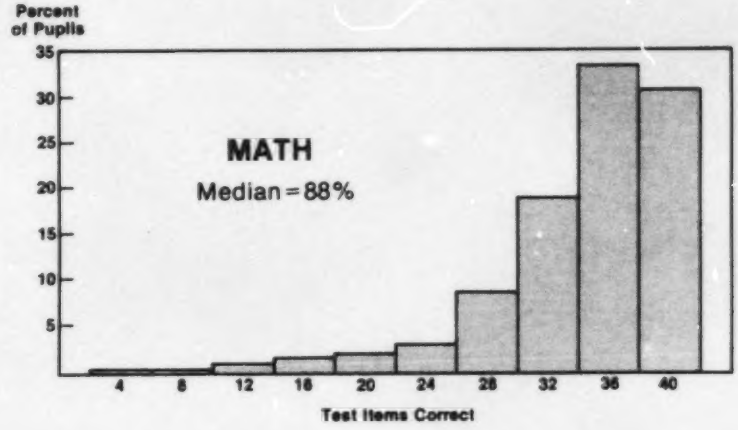

These charts show that a substantial number of pupils attained high scores on the BSLC Pupil Attainment Tests. In both reading and math the majority of pupils received scores of 80% (32 correct) or better.

Pupil Achievements and BSLC Success

Pupil achievements in both reading and mathematics were outstanding during this first year for schools to use the BSLC instructional kits in the classroom.

Designed primarily to help children catch up in important reading and mathematics skills, the BSLC materials helped to forward the progress of more than 95,000 children. One way of measuring this progress is the results of BSLC Pupil Attainment Tests provided as part of the project. Using the Pupil Attainment Tests, teachers were able to determine how well children acquired basic skills, before moving on to more advanced material.

Each test contains 40 items, thus a score of 80% translates to a pupil answering 32 of the 40 items correctly. In reading, median pupil proficiency as reflected by the Pupil Attainment Tests was 83%. In mathematics, the median pupil proficiency was 88%. This represents solid achievement in basic skills from children who had fallen behind.

Pupil Attainment Tests aided teachers beyond simply reporting end-of-kit pupil achievement information. In fact, teachers used sections of the test as tools in helping to determine what kind of further instruction a pupil required. The Pupil Attainment Tests were carefully designed to be flexible so that they could serve this diagnostic function, as well.

Another way to view the accomplishments of these elementary school pupils during this first year of instruction is the amount of instruction they completed. Children who completed **more than one** BSLC kit were actually progressing faster than the typical grade-by-grade rate, and were, therefore, beginning to move out of remedial status. Children who completed **one** kit were keeping up with the typical grade-by-grade rate. Over 52,000 children were able to progress through reading instruction and nearly 53,500 children progressed through mathematics instruction at or above the typical rate of completion. This means that a substantial proportion of BSLC pupils were able to halt or reverse the slide into remedial status.

These results are impressive for the first year of full program operation. As teachers and administrators adjust and refine their application of BSLC concepts and resources, they can expect even more impressive results in continued BSLC program operations.

What People Are Saying About BSLC

"We are currently making good use of the materials. They have become a valuable component of our school's reading program."

—Fort Defiance, Arizona

"The program is proceeding very well in our schools and we want you to know we appreciate everything you've done for us."

—Bremerton, Washington

"I like the SWRL kits. They have helped me in many ways, especially like fraction problems that I have never known how to do before. They also help me learn about looking up words in the dictionary and to do long division."

—Student in Sapulpa, Oklahoma

"The teachers were extremely enthusiastic about the relevance of the materials as they related with our existing programs. The teachers found that as they covered materials in the regular math programs, students who were having difficulty mastering specific concepts seemed to gain a better understanding of these as the existing materials were supported with specific SWRL activities... During the summer of 1977, the school staff developed minimal competencies in these areas and it was discovered that the skills emphasized in the SWRL kits were directly related to those skills developed by our staff when implementing the proficiencies."

—Merced, California

"The Basic Skills Learning Centers (BSLC) for reading has been of great use to my seventh and eighth grade learning disabled students. The highly structured individual applicative task analyses, and the short, varied format of the kits make them ideal as a program for some students, and a reinforcement exercise for others."

—Casper, Wyoming

"The SWRL Kit has been quite beneficial in my classroom as it provides the individual student an opportunity to work on his own pace and level. The students like the kits and enjoy working on them without any prompting from the teacher. The kits also help reinforce the bilingual program in providing additional individualized instructions."

—Bernalillo, New Mexico

"The students and I have all found that the SWRL units on measurement and geometry are an invaluable addition to our program. These units have taught the practical skills of telling time, making change, and measuring objects to many of my students who hadn't learned these skills from other approaches. Thank you."

—Helena, Montana

These and many other participant comments are on file at SWRL.

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A Typical BSLC School

What does a BSLC school look like? Is it big or small? How many students does it have? How many of those students are working in Basic Skills Learning Centers? Let's take a brief look at a typical BSLC school.

Our typical school is situated in a rural area, although its actual building is located in a modest-sized community. There are six other schools in our district. Our school is one of four elementary schools that are participating in the BSLC Project.

The student population of the school district is about 2,500 with 350 of those students attending our school. A quarter of these are either of Native American heritage or have Spanish surnames. Family incomes of the students who attend our school are about 20 percent below the national median of $12,700. Our school qualifies for Title I assistance.

More than half of the students attending our school, some 180 of them, are participating in Basic Skills Learning Centers. There are eight Learning Centers here, six that combine reading and mathematics instruction, one that is reading only and one that is mathematics only.

The students are improving through Learning Center instruction. Pupil Attainment Tests, given to students when they complete a kit, indicate steady improvement in basic skills. BSLC materials have helped to halt the slide into remediation for nearly two-thirds of our BSLC students. BSLC students are not only holding their own but are catching up with their nonremedial counterparts.

The BSLC Project has worked in our typical school just as it has in the real BSLC schools. Because of this success our typical school added a new Learning Center for the second school year of the BSLC Project.

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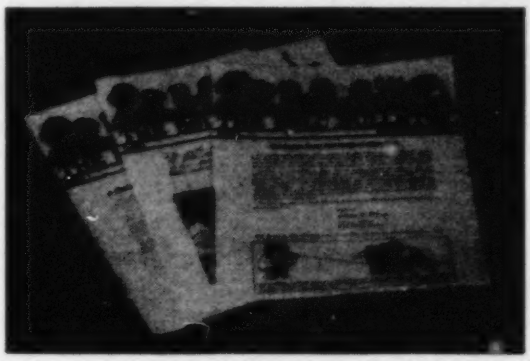

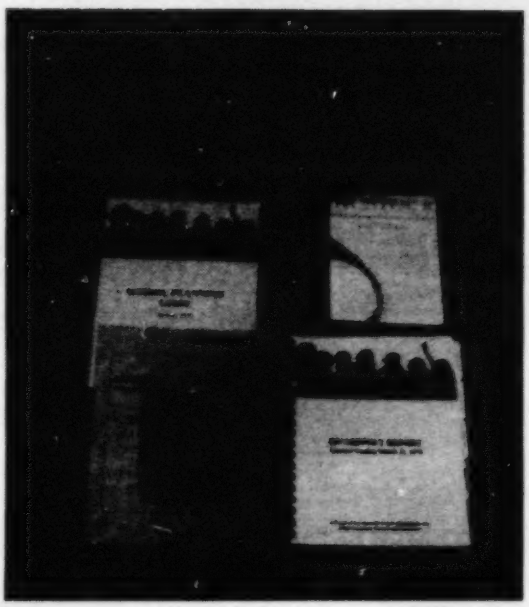

NEW SUPPORT MATERIALS

The second year resulted in new support materials for the BSLC Project. Placement Aids arrived early in the year to start the children at their most effective level in the right kits and the appropriate lessons. Accomplishment Summaries arrived somewhat later to help teachers report Learning Center accomplishments and pupil progress for the 1977-78 school year. Both kinds of materials were designed and simplified to make their application brief yet effective.

Descriptive reports derived from Accomplishment Summary information are used to inform schools and districts about the progress of the project. They provide the project's external evaluator, the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California at Los Angeles, with liaison information. And they provide information to support SWRL's growing data base for BSLC Project refinement.

Paralleling the Placement Aids are the BSLC End-of-Year Tests, which were administered to a sample of 26 BSLC school districts as a further measurement of project effectiveness. The information gathered from the End-of-Year Tests helps SWRL assess the quality and effectiveness of project materials and procedures.

Information Sharing

Information sharing during this second year of the BSLC Project was enhanced by the growth of the BSLC Bulletin, wide use and acceptance of the BSLC Project Film, and continual direct communication between project staff and school participants. Problems, solutions, concerns and successes were aired by phone, in writing, on film. BSLC people talked to one another...

BULLETIN

Year two for the BSLC Bulletin, a main channel for project communication, was particularly effective. Two-way information exchange was accomplished by the Bulletin; first, by using the Bulletin to disseminate information concerning project coordination, and second, by encouraging wide response from participating BSLC schools.

In keeping with the philosophy that the BSLC Project belongs to its participants with necessary support rendered by the coordinating staff, the Bulletin emphasized school-level activities. It also gave featured publication to the many responses it received from teachers and students. Letters, articles, photographs and pictures flowed in from schools in all parts of the 20 western states—a cooperative response in tune with the spirit of the BSLC Project.

The "BSLC Pipeline" section of the Bulletin that is devoted to project participants carried items such as an Oklahoma teacher's feelings about her classroom learning center—photos of Hopi children from Arizona—Wyoming learning centers meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities—and letters from students.

As a hard working part of the BSLC Project, the Bulletin highlighted "tips for teachers" about using the learning center materials more effectively, talked about remediation and extension applications of the materials, helped schedule the Mid-Project Meetings and explained the use of project materials such as the Pupil Attainment Tests.

BSLC PROJECT FILM

A new 16mm film has been yet another way of stimulating the outreach of BSLC information during this second year of the project. Entitled "The Basic Skills Learning Centers Project," the twelve-minute sound and color film has been seen by student, school, and community groups across the nation. Intended for just such a wide audience, the film gives an outline impression of how the project works in the schools. Besides showing Learning Centers in action, the film briefly sketches the planning phases of the project to give the viewer an idea of project beginnings in the schools and its continued success. The responsibilities and contributions of the Community Services Administration and participating state and local education agencies is explained and acknowledged.

QUARTERLY REPORTS

Throughout this past year, Quarterly Reports have carefully recorded the full scope of BSLC Project activities. Designed to serve the development, coordination and supervisory staff of the Project, the Quarterly Reports document the course of the Project.

BSLC Being Put to Many Uses

Beyond their use for general remedial purposes, the BSLC materials have proven useful to teachers working with handicapped children and with older students still needing basic skills remediation. A number of districts and schools report that they plan to use the reading and math kits at the junior and senior high levels this upcoming school year.

In particular, several schools plan to use the materials in special education classes and with the learning disabled. One school plans to incorporate the materials into a special program for high school dropouts who still need basic skills.

Teachers report several reasons why the BSLC materials are effective for these special instructional applications. First, the task analysis provided by the program helps teachers know immediately how and where in the instructional sequence skills are taught.

Second, the lessons are short and varied and thereby keep the student's attention. One teacher reported that most students feel that the material is "easy" because "even if they can't do part of one card, they can do the next." The lesson-by-lesson approach also allows the students to use the material independently.

Third, the record sheet and categorized nature of the BSLC instruction gives students a sense of completion and accomplishment as they move through the lessons.

Finally, the readability level of the materials, especially the stories in the Basic Reading Skills Kit, is appropriate for pupils who have never before been able to read independently.

Information about the Basic Skills Learning Centers Project may be obtained by writing or calling:

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SWRL Educational Research and Development
4665 Lampson Avenue
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
(213) 598-7661
(714) 821-7790

Your call or letter will be directed to one of the following persons:

Ms. Vivian Grange, Project Manager
or
Ms. Brenda August
Mr. James Mineo
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